

Against Barcelona? Gaudí, the City, and Nature

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If you look North from the fortress mountain of Montjuïc, across the rooftops of Barcelona, you will see the emerging mass of the church of the Holy Family, the Sagrada Família. Once completed, if all goes according to plan, the mass will look like a mountain in the middle of the city. The mountainous appearance of the building was intentional from its conception and is central in the spatial thinking of Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926). As his biographer Gijs van Hensbergen reports, the architect joined the Associació Catalana d'Excursions Científiques in 1879, an organization devoted to the study of mountains (92). Gaudí's interest in mountains continued as he developed his ideas of nature (or Nature) as teacher. Notions of the mountain as a place of origin and purity abound in the literature contemporary with Gaudí's career (Sobrer).

Barcelona sits at the foot of two guardian mountains: Montjuïc and the peak of the Collserola range known as Tibidabo (a reference to Matthew 4.9, when the devil says to Christ: "All these *I will give you*, if you will fall down and worship me"). The Sagrada Família, once completed, would triangulate the terrain. The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of plans for erecting some sort of vigilant church overlooking a crowded metropolis. A proposal was made in 1870 in Paris for the construction of the basilica of the *Sacré Coeur*, or Sacred Heart, on a privileged position at the very top of Montmartre and fundraising began in 1873. The architect Paul Abadie designed the church in the Roman-Byzantine style. The first stone



was laid in 1875 and the basilica was completed in 1914 and consecrated after the war in 1919. Its dominant location can be easily exploited, as the Nazis did famously in their propaganda newsreels when they took over Paris. Barcelona soon followed suit, erecting its own mountain-top basilica. In 1902, construction began on the Expiatory Temple of the Sacred Heart atop Tibidabo; the building was designed by Enric Sagnier in the neo-Gothic style and was clearly meant to impress onlookers near and far. Land for the temple had been given to the Salesian order of San Giovanni Bosco in 1886.

The other expiatory temple in Barcelona, the Sagrada Família, is being built in the city barely above sea level; it is to *be* a mountain itself rather than *sit* on one. The Sagrada Família—work on which began in 1882—has attracted universal fame. Leaving aside its status as a world-class architectural landmark, the Sagrada Família attracts the attention of students of cultural phenomena and of scholars interested in the relations between culture and physical space as well as, more particularly, between Gaudí and Barcelona. The relations between the Sagrada Família and the city that houses it present a paradigmatic process worthy of attention.

Busloads of camera-toting tourists flock to the Sagrada Família daily and pay the price of admission to take a closer look; the revenue thus generated reverts in great part to the continuation of the works. Many of the tourists become enthusiasts; a web search on “Sagrada Família” produces a number of giddy sites online, with detailed pictures taken from gravity-defying positions. One can feel the awe that the building inspires, an awe on which

recent films capitalize: Ventura Pons’s *Food of Love* and Susan Seidelman’s *Gaudí Afternoons* have been released in the “Gaudí Year” of 2002. In its monumentality, the Sagrada Família is a triumph, an outburst of imagination and playfulness. The visitor cannot fail to admire the mixture of religious and natural motifs in the church’s decoration: columns resting atop sculpted sea turtles, gargoyles in the shape of snails, stony bunches of grapes crowning towers. A life-size tree, made of stone and mosaic, hovers over one portal. Indeed, people are drawn to calling the church a cathedral because of its grandiose proportions. In any case, the church is so imposing that it has become the emblem of Barcelona much as the Eiffel Tower has become the emblem of Paris, at least in the popular, totalizing imagination of wonder-seeking travelers.

Yet the success is touristic, that is to say, a laic success. The actual significance of the Sagrada Família stands in some sort of tension with its purported religious intent, which was one of expiation or atonement for societal sins. On the surface at least, this tension entails a contradiction, as today’s laic signification of the Sagrada Família appears opposed to the expiatory program that brought the building to life. Yet it is that program of expiation which is responsible for the continuation of the work in today’s Barcelona. To be sure, the building owes its conception to the highest ideals of religious revival—and to patriotic renaissance. The Catalan *Renaixença* of the mid-nineteenth century was mostly a literary phenomenon, but it was literary in the sense that the emerging community, in its will to nationhood, deemed the protection of the Catalan language to be essential, thereby

casting its literature as a political wager. Representative of *Renaixença* cultural politics were the poetic contests known as *Jocs Florals*, in which aspiring as well as established authors presented works that treated one of three accepted themes: *Fe*, *Pàtria*, *Amor*—faith, home country, love. Of the three, love was a concession to literary tradition. The other two—*Fe* and *Pàtria*—impregnate the conception of the Sagrada Família and much of Gaudí's architecture.

Nevertheless, the success of Gaudí's architecture is as agnostic as it is non-national. The intention was to create a temple that would modernize the tradition of the gothic cathedrals of Europe, be the work of generations, and stand at once as a spiritual and literal beacon for the community. Its highest tower, we are told, will bear a cross visible from all angles, and each arm will be capable of emitting a beam of light. The Sagrada Família was—and is—to tower over the city of Barcelona, to be seen from any direction, and to symbolize the faith of the Catalans. Before we rush to proclaim that the late nineteenth and, even more, the twentieth centuries are no longer ages of faith, and that such a project is in some sense anachronistic (particularly since Barcelona does not appear to be an especially pious city), we ought to keep in mind that the great gothic cathedrals of Europe were built out of social ostentation as much as out of faith. The works of such great cathedrals as Burgos or León, or the Barcelona cathedral for that matter, proceeded thanks to the monies lent by the noble or even bourgeois families who would then see one of the side chapels bearing their name and devoted to a special saint of theirs.

Of course, in the fourteenth century, religion was indistinguishable from social life. In the twentieth century, the new “cathedral” was to emerge thanks to myriad contributions of the masses. Gaudí himself, in his fund-raising efforts, spoke of sacrifice, of giving “‘til it hurts” as he gathered contributions from all runs of society. Consequently the Sagrada Família was not to have any side chapels; it was to be a democratic or even a populist “cathedral”: “la catedral dels pobres,” as Joaquim Mir depicted it in a famous painting. In a no less famous article, the poet Joan Maragall appealed to the generosity of the wealthy urging them not to be outdone by the less privileged in their giving to the temple (Maragall 706). In fact, it has been the wonder-seeking masses, the new pilgrims called tourists, who have ultimately spearheaded the financing of the building.

The irony of the transformation has affected the way the citizens of Barcelona, and in particular its intellectuals, view and value the church. Although Gaudí, its chief architect, died in 1926, and although detailed plans were destroyed by the vandalism that accompanied the Civil War, and even though the ideological impetus that gave rise to the Sagrada Família may no longer hold sway, construction goes on. Construction goes on, moreover, indifferent to the changes that come with the passing of time. In today's rushed and skeptical work, a monument to Catholic faith is slowly coming into being. This monument rises in a city of merchants and industrialists, artisans and workers, people who by and large consider themselves, surely rightly, the most “European” of Spaniards. In a way, the Sagrada Família is being built *against* Barcelona, but it was

also *conceived* against Barcelona. And yet, it is in Barcelona that this anachronistic man-made mountain is rising. And as a symbol of Barcelona it now stands. This is one of the paradoxes of the Sagrada Família.

The most famous part of the church—which many consider the only original one since it was built under Gaudí's direct supervision—the Nativity portal, is already decaying due to urban pollution. As the temple laboriously goes up, it is beginning to erode, although its physical decomposition seems slower than that of its meaning. Construction goes on, polemically, or anachronistically, according to the basic dictates of its conception—*Fe, Pàtria*. A private foundation within the Archbishopric of Barcelona owns the site; its Construction Committee, headed by the architect Joan Jordi Bergós i Tejero, is in charge of the continuation of the work. The sculptor Josep Maria Subirachs has taken charge of the iconographic representations that cover the new construction. To work on the Sagrada Família Subirachs has abandoned all other projects and has moved his residence to the site of the building, exactly as Gaudí did towards the end of his life. Subirachs's sculptures for the temple incorporate a number of contemporary traits. His characteristic sharp edges and, more importantly, his plentiful referentiality to other Gaudí works, are the stone equivalent of intertextuality. On the Passion portal, for example, the Roman soldiers leading Jesus to the cross sport helmets in the exact shape of the air vents atop Gaudí's Casa Milà, located in another part of Barcelona's Eixample. Still, Subirachs's work remains well within Catholic orthodoxy.

A number of Barcelona intellectuals, mainly those associated with the non-

Catholic left, find Subirachs's work, and indeed the whole Sagrada Família completion, wrongheaded. As an architectural historian and Gaudí scholar bluntly put it to me: "Subirachs's work is kitsch." Such a statement typifies aesthetic attitudes that go against the grain, but also implies a static, absolute notion of what is beautiful and, ultimately, true. One might question, opposing such an opposition, whether such a religious monument as, say, the main altarpiece in the cathedral of Seville is not also kitsch. Indeed, can most church art, typically designed to awe the masses, escape the label? What "dekitchifies" a work of art is survival, oldness, age. The detractors of today's continuation of the Sagrada Família have organized public demonstrations and have engaged the speaking abilities of well-known intellectuals, such as the late Joan Brossa. Brossa, an avant-garde poet and artist, made the headlines after he spoke at a rally decrying the nomination of Subirachs as chief sculptor for the Sagrada Família.

Alternative contests for completing the construction of the temple in non-traditional ways have been held as well. To the eyes of these detractors, a radical re-design might well solve the contradiction of completing a monument to *Fe* and *Pàtria* in a city that has arguably lost its faith and that has secured a place in the global community of business and tour operators. These protests, however, have died down in recent years. Whether one agrees with them or not, the Juggernaut of the construction continues. Its scope alone awakens admiration, however reluctant. Ultimately, the Barcelonese admire success, and the Sagrada Família undoubtedly "sells." When I was young, the city's emblematic construction, by some sort of

informal consensus, was the Columbus monument, at the foot of the Rambla, constructed for the World's Fair of 1888, the work of architect Gaietà Buigas and the sculptor Rafael Atché. Nowadays the emblem of the city's architecture is the Sagrada Família, and the city's reputation in the non-negligible world of tourism is built around Gaudí. In most visitor's itineraries the great Gothic constructions of the Barcelona Cathedral and Santa Maria del Mar play second fiddle to the Sagrada Família or the Park Güell.

The banner of "Gaudínism" was one of the weapons of the recent opposition to the continued construction of the church. Given that Gaudí's detailed plans were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War, today's completion, some claim, is a sham. But today Gaudí—and all that the name Gaudí has come to represent—is virtually untouchable; to decry Gaudí would be to decry Barcelona, if not Catalonia. Thus, any protest against the Sagrada Família has to be waged under the pretense of purism. This is a new twist in the paradoxical reverberations between a city and its preeminent building.

Before the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, however, opposition to the construction was a fact of life. Barbs were aimed at Gaudí's art itself. The figure of the architect also became the butt of many a caricature in the satirical press. While a poet of the stature of Joan Maragall had defended the construction and, in fact, worked most decidedly to give it popular and institutional support, other relevant intellectuals had opposed it. Shortly after Gaudí's death, the fashionable playwright and essayist Carles Soldevila wrote a good-humored and elegant text on the occasion of Barcelona's 1929 World's Fair. In

Soldevila's "L'Art d'ensenyar Barcelona," the addressee is a Barcelonese citizen who needs to guide a visiting if fictional German family, the Kaufmanns, who desire a complete tour. This is how Soldevila instructs his host to introduce Gaudí's work:

—You have followed the Passeig de Gràcia. When you reach La PEDRERA you give them a resigned smile and point.

—What's that?—The Kaufmanns will intone as a chorus.

—We're not yet quite sure—you may tell them.—The building has been in existence for more than twenty years, and yet we Barcelonese do not quite know what to make of it.

—But...it surely must serve some purpose?

[...]

—It's the work of an architect of unquestionable genius but with a highly personal taste. Let us, if you will, take a look at another of his works, LA SAGRADA FAMILIA, a cathedral still under construction. And let us be done with this unavoidable chapter. (21)¹

Soldevila's account includes no mention of religious significance other than mistakenly calling the Gaudí building a cathedral. Soldevila clearly accepts the tourist-attraction value of Gaudí's work and begrudgingly bestows on the architect the epithet of genius. He is less generous a few lines later:

On the way, under questioning from the Kaufmanns, you will have to explain that Barcelona has had the misfortune to have a good part of its Eixample built to follow the beat of the so-called *Modernisme*. Towards the

end of the nineteenth century, it abandoned the moderate norms of neoclassicism that had given birth to the Marianao and Planàs Palaces and the house called El Cano and so on, and got entangled in the creation of an original architecture without precedent, and often without grace. You tell them this nicely, without pedantry, without a shadow of disdain for previous generations, the way one deplores a blemish in one's own family. (21-22)

Soldevila's jabs against Gaudí's work are sharpened by his condescending tone. His rejection might have been unpopular, but it was not unique among intellectuals. Before the end of the Civil War, George Orwell blasted against Gaudí. In a famous passage of his *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell writes:

For the first time since I had been in Barcelona I went to have a look at the cathedral—a modern cathedral, and one of the most hideous buildings in the world. It has four crenellated spires exactly the shape of hock bottles. Unlike most of the churches in Barcelona it was not damaged during the revolution—it was spared because of its 'artistic value,' people said. I think the Anarchists showed bad taste in not blowing it up when they had the chance, though they did hang a red and black banner between its spires. (225)

For Orwell the Sagrada Família was so unaesthetic as to *deserve* obliteration. Interestingly, Orwell did not know or stop to reflect that the Sagrada Família was built against the anarchists, as we shall see later. The anarchists' putative respect on artistic grounds might be another para-

dox among the many paradoxes that seem to accompany the urban presence of the Sagrada Família.

The pre-war critique of Gaudí by such writers as Soldevila has been explained by reference to cultural trends of the times. Gaudí, a representative of Catalan *Modernisme*, would be seen negatively by the *Noucentistes*, successors and opponents of the former. Carles Soldevila began his writing career under the aegis of *Noucentisme*, a word coined by Eugeni d'Ors to differentiate the movement from *Modernisme*. Accepted critical opinion has *Modernisme* and *Noucentisme* as opposites, an opposition belligerently posited by the *Noucentistes* themselves. According to this view, *Modernisme* would be internationalist, bohemian, and non-religious, while *Noucentisme* would be local, traditional, and classically inspired. The polarity *Modernisme-Noucentisme* has more recently come under fire; for some scholars *Noucentisme* is simply a continuation of *Modernisme*. Others have sought to define the movement in its own terms. According to a seminal article by Josep Murgades Barceló, by *Noucentisme* we must understand:

el fenomen ideològic que, entre el 1906 i el 1923 aproximadament, tipifica les aspiracions hegemòniques dels nuclis més actius de la burgesia catalana, postula els seus interessos en un pla ideal i [...] formula models i projectes que [...] contribueixen a establir pautes de comportament social tendents a possibilitar la viabilitat d'una acció reformista. (39-40)

With this rather cumbersome definition Murgades reacts against previous dynamic definitions that saw *Noucentisme*

as the reaction, with all pertinent anxieties, to the earlier *Modernisme*, a movement of international inspiration akin, in the plastic arts, to *Art Nouveau*. Recent criticism has reacted against views of *Modernisme* as an isolated, Catalan movement, and have sought to explain it in a wider, international context (Epps). Murgades too warns against the simplicity of views that would make *Noucentisme* essentially a reactionary response to the progressive and internationalist attitudes of *Modernistes*. For Murgades, *Noucentisme* should be defined in social and ideological terms. He goes on in his analysis to identify five traits—corresponding to the most famous of the terms (Murgades calls them “fetish-words”) put in vogue by Eugeni d’Ors: *noucentisme*, *imperialisme*, *arbitrarisme*, *classicisme*, *civiltat*. Curiously Gaudí, who seems to have been the *Noucentistes*’ embarrassment if not *bête noire*, evinces all five of the “traits.”

Noucentisme, the first and most “successful” term, implies, for Murgades, the ideology “de presentar-se com a superadora de totes les ideologies existents, com a portadora d’una panacea universal” (45). Gaudí certainly conceived of his work as a panacea and a culmination, a *superació* or improvement on all preexisting architectural styles. An anecdote published by Gaudí’s disciple, Isidre Puig Boada, can illustrate this. A viewer of the Sagrada Família observed to Gaudí: “Us ha sortit molt gòtica.” Gaudí is said to have replied: “Ben al contrari. És grega.” Greek? One can sense the *Noucentistes* cringing at the thought. Yet Gaudí, I believe, was joking only in part. The “accusation” of Gothicism has to do with Gaudí’s interest in great height for the Sagrada Família and with his reliance in his work on such so-

lutions as the parabolic arch and the inclined column. These were his engineering contributions to solving what he saw as the flaw of Gothic architecture: the need to support a structure with external elements such as flying buttresses. His engineered solutions could achieve the height that is the mark of Gothic architecture without such structural crutches. Gaudí conceived of his architecture in terms of synthesis and solution.

Similar arguments could be made to apply to Gaudí the other “fetish-words” associated with *Noucentisme*: *imperialisme* or the confluence of power and aesthetics; *arbitrarisme* or the predominance of the role played by the artist; *civiltat* or the centrality of the city of Barcelona as *Pàtria*—“Cap i Casal de Catalunya,” in the slogan that one still hears; and *classicisme* or the return to the norm. Gaudí was at least bowing in the direction of *classicisme* when he—I believe quite earnestly—claimed that the Sagrada Família was Greek. Rather than becoming entangled in the *Modernisme-Noucentisme* opposition, we might do better to consider Gaudí’s work, and that of his detractors, as elements in a continuum that engulfs both *Modernisme* and *Noucentisme*.

Gaudí’s work and, most especially, his Sagrada Família may be more clearly understood by reference to two movements outside of the *Modernista-Noucentista* debate, and outside of strictly Catalan culture. One is international and relates to the above-mentioned *arbitrarisme*; the other is local and relates to *imperialisme*. The *Modernistes* laid claim to an international outlook in their stated attempts to distinguish themselves, as moderns, from the eminently ruralist “Renaixença.”² The international *Modernista* bent was influ-

enced by the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and more particularly by the doctrines and practice of William Morris. To put it in very general terms, one of the consequences of industrialization was the mechanization of trade with the consequent weakening, even to the point of disappearance, of the artisanal world. Morris, and Gaudí, sought to protect and revive this world, their modernity looking to the past as much as to the future.

In his book, *Material Culture*, Henry Glassie writes:

William Morris told us to cease thinking of art as the rarefied expression of a mystically talented few, or as the peculiar possession of rich men. He argued that work is the mother of art. (Glassie 70)

Here we see the notion of art as craft, fitting perfectly the slogan the *Noucentistes* associated with their *arbitrarisme*: “L’obra ben feta,” the well-made work. Against Glassie, one could argue that for all the noble intentions of Morris, the arts and crafts movement entails a further appropriation by the bourgeoisie of the “popular” and, in some respects, a further increase in the alienation of the poor. Whatever the case, it is undoubtable that Gaudí shared Morris’s ideals. Indeed, in his recent biography of Gaudí, Gijs van Hensbergen remarks on Gaudí’s indebtedness to the ideas of Morris and Ruskin (van Hensbergen 94). We shall return later to Gaudí’s populism.

Brad Epps has developed the work of some predecessors, such as Geoffrey Ribbons, and has striven to place Catalan *Modernisme* at once in and against the context of international Western modernism. In architecture certainly, twentieth-

century modernism has shown a tendency towards dematerialization, towards the hegemony of the ideological over the material. Le Corbusier (1887-1965) and, even more radically, Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) brought architecture to a stark simplicity, with sobriety of line and the absence of the decorative emblemizing the modern building. Gaudí’s modernity is quite different, even accounting for the fact that he was older than his colleagues. For Gaudí, architecture is akin to the Wagnerian congealing of a number of crafts: stone and iron, tile, painting, furniture, bell making, and so on. One might even say that Gaudí is a symphony where Mies is chamber music. Gaudí’s modernity is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. A question that arises and to which we shall return is whether Gaudí’s modernity is also reactionary.

The use of broken pieces of glazed ceramic as “abstract” mosaics decorating a given architectural element—a technique known by the Catalan term *trencadís*—is a case in point. *Trencadís* is a popular technique, decidedly counter-cultural. Employing rejected or discarded materials from both construction and home (broken saucers, for example), Gaudí often relegated the actual application of *trencadís* to craftsmen with no formal architectural training. In symbolic terms, *trencadís* exalts the poor, the broken, the outcast; in artistic terms, it creates an illusion. *Trencadís* makes a purse out of a sow’s ear, so to speak, and thus defines the artist as illusionist and (re)creator. *Trencadís* is a perfect material metaphor: it elevates the lowly into the lofty; it makes one of the broken many.

Another adaptation of popular—or at least non-academic—techniques was the famed *maqueta funicular*, a system

Gaudí used to design the parabolic or catenary arches and vaults of his buildings (an emblematic example of the design being the arches of the Teresianes convent in Barcelona, from 1888-90). This may not be strictly a “popular” technique since, as far as I know, it was invented by Gaudí himself, but it can be considered nevertheless as consonant with the hands-on spirit of craftsmanship. The system consisted of the tying of little sacks of buck-shot (*perdigons*) to different lengths of string (Latin *funiculi*) or chain (Latin *catena*) hanging from the ceiling of the workshop. The strings or chains were in turn attached to each other to form a structure. By turning this mock-up upside-down, Gaudí calculated the shape of the arches and the inclination of the columns needed to support his structures and consequently eliminated the need for such non-essential elements as flying buttresses.

Juan José Lahuerta, in his well-documented and detailed *Antoni Gaudí: Arquitectura, ideología y política*, dismisses the technique as an example of Gaudí’s anti-intellectualism and, therefore, as reactionary conservatism. The funicular model, however, just as the simpler catenary arch designs, is a beautiful example of Gaudí’s imagination, of his ability to conceive of a project organically rather than merely intellectually. Directly or indirectly, it bears a debt to Morris’s ideas and is an homage to the creativity of the pre-industrial world. Again, the technique has symbolic value and becomes a material metaphor. The catenary arches give the ensuing structure the look of a natural formation, and their accumulation that of a mountain. The resulting building will be, literally and symbolically, an organic form, a natural formation.

The most famous result of the funicular design technique can be found in what many *cognoscenti* believe to be Gaudí’s masterpiece, the design for the chapel at the Colònia Güell in Santa Coloma de Cervelló, near Barcelona. Like the Sagrada Família, the Colònia chapel design takes the overall shape of a mountain, not unlike that of Montserrat which, on a clear day, can be seen from parts of Barcelona. Montserrat rises above a large plane with jagged pinnacles of gray sandstone. It is an imposing sight that, through the centuries, has been endowed with religious and political symbolism. Atop the mountain, a Benedictine monastery preserves the cult of the Virgin who has become the patron saint of Catalonia. Montserrat has also become a center for Catalan nationalism, being at once a natural fortress and a place of worship. Montserrat is seen by many as Catalonia’s stony heart. In imitating its jagged shapes, Gaudí’s buildings, such as the Sagrada Família and the chapel at the Colònia Güell, transcend their pragmatic ends into the mystical. Gaudí eventually devoted himself to the larger of these two projects, the urban one, and he left the suburban chapel plans unfinished.

Gaudí’s populism, nevertheless, must be seen in the context of the system of patronage on which he built his career, a patronage that cannot be dissociated from the name of the architect’s main employer, Eusebi Güell i Bacigalupi (1846-1918). The Colònia Güell chapel was an integral part of a grand capitalist plan by the industrialist Güell to create a factory town near Barcelona that would take advantage both of the natural resources of the Llobregat river and of the isolation of the workers. Dorothy Noyes has studied this intriguing topic and has

brought to the fore the connections between capitalist planning and the culture of the time. The Catalan term *colònia* sounds more distinguished than its English equivalent, factory town, but the reality is the same: a patronizing scheme to move workers away from the city (where they would surely be tempted to unionize) and to keep them close to the company store (and to the influence of the Catholic Church and its preachings of resignation in the face of material hardship). It is in this sense too that, as Güell's main collaborator, Gaudí can be said to be against Barcelona.

Let us now turn to the second of the aforementioned contexts, the local, a context related to the *Noucentistes' imperia-lisme*. We tend to see "great figures" or "geniuses" as isolated monuments whose principal referent is to the divine. Let us however examine some of the conditions that make sense of, if not explain, Gaudí. This "figure" has become what Michel Foucault famously defined as an "author," that is someone whose name is synonymous with a holistic and closed interpretation of his work. But let us look at this author, this "figure," in his local context.

Along with Lluís Domènech i Montaner (1850-1923) and the lesser known Camil Oliveras, Gaudí was a member of the circle of architect Joan Martorell i Montells (1833-1906). Martorell was, if one allows the oxymoron, a conservative revolutionary. He reacted against the imitative style of an earlier generation, of men such as Elies Rogent (1821-1897), the architect of the neo-Romanesque downtown building of the University of Barcelona (1863-89). Martorell, in his buildings, wanted to refer or return to a type of architecture he considered essentially

Spanish, the style known as *Mudéjar*, which combines Christian (gothic) and Arabic decorative elements and which pointedly employs a combination of materials—stone, brick, and tile—in which brick walls are left uncovered, an effect known in Catalan as *obra vista*. From *obra vista* to *trencadís* there is but one small step. It was Martorell, by the way, who recommended Gaudí as main architect for the Sagrada Família after the project, barely begun, was abandoned by its original architect, Francisco de Paula del Villar, towards the end of 1883.

Juan José Lahuerta characterizes Martorell's school as presenting "tiempo acumulado," that is, as creating buildings that synthesize diverse architectural styles from different historical periods—combining, say, gothic lines with a *Mudéjar* finish and Greek-revival elements such as doric columns. The Catalan bourgeoisie, according to Lahuerta, flocked to Martorell with commissions for buildings that, with their "accumulated time," would provide the semblance of historical duration, and thus legitimacy. Gaudí's patron, Eusebi Güell, was given the title of Viscount by King Alfonso XIII in 1918. For Güell, Gaudí designed most of his famous buildings: the palace on Carrer Nou de la Rambla, the chapel at the Colònia Güell in Santa Maria de Cervelló, and the now famous Park Güell that was to lure buyers to an English-style high-income subdivision.³

The architects of the school of Barcelona contributed to the ennoblement of the Catalan bourgeoisie. For good or for ill, the collaboration between architects and the bourgeoisie was a symbiotic, creative relationship. The works created by the Barcelona architects show a rich

originality. Leftist critics such as Lahuerta tend to downplay the artistic innovation of the Catalan bourgeoisie (ennobled at the time by the restored Spanish monarchy). Such critics may be misled by allowing their political judgments to influence their views. Not all bourgeois are equal when it comes to choosing architectural styles, as is evident by comparing the work of Gaudí, Domènech, and others with that of their contemporary colleagues world-wide. Go to Newport, Rhode Island, take the architectural tour, and keep the Barcelona architects in mind as you stroll through the ostentatious villas erected for the Vanderbilts and their set. Or you might contrast a building that, with bureaucratic rather than bourgeois support, came up at about the same time as the Sagrada Família, the Madrid post office, the “Palacio de Comunicaciones,” built between 1905 and 1918, the work of architects Antonio Palacios and Joaquín Otamendi. This neo-gothic fantasy is often described as a wedding cake perhaps because it has the color of frosting, and maybe even the taste. Nor has Barcelona itself escaped the bane of “official” architecture, an example being the *Palau Nacional*, also on Montjuïc, now housing Catalan medieval art collections.

The above is not to deny the connivance between the Catalan bourgeoisie and *Modernista* architecture. After all, the *nouveaux nobles* were supported not by their titles or by their architects but by their businesses, their factories, and the workers therein. Nonetheless, architecture would play a role in controlling, or attempting to control, the social unrest that the bourgeoisie feared. In a recent book, historian Fernando García de Cortázar writes:

El proyecto era colosal, un bosque de torres levantándose sobre Barcelona, la ciudad ensombrecida por las protestas obreras y las bombas anarquistas. Gaudí siempre entendió la Sagrada Família como un templo expiatorio de los pecados de la burguesía y un símbolo del triunfo de la cristiandad sobre las corrientes anticlericales que atraían a la gran urbe de la Renaixença. (167)

García’s assertion is poetic and high-minded, but debatable. The Sagrada Família was not meant to expiate the sins of the bourgeoisie, at least not primarily. Its official name is indeed Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família. Administratively speaking, the building is not a cathedral, despite its size and the popular belief echoed by Carles Soldevila, George Orwell, and so many others. The name “temple” tends to be given to church buildings that do not quite fit the regular division of places of worship within the Catholic system, that is, the cathedral and the many parishes of a city. The erection of a temple to the Holy Family in Barcelona was the dream-child of Josep Maria Bocabella i Verdager (1815-1892), who had formed the “Asociación Espiritual de Devotos de San José” and published its periodical, *El Propagador de la Devoción a San José*. The explicit aim of the *Josefins*, and therefore of the temple, was to combat the perceived sins of the exalted proletariat, specifically of the anarchists, who had often turned violent in their wrath against clerics and places of worship.

There had been waves of church and convent burnings throughout Spain, but most intensely in Catalonia, since the mid 1830s, a time known as “el període de les bullagues,” the era of riots. The most

famous of the violent anticlerical outbursts was of course the “Setmana Tràgica,” or “Tragic Week,” of July 26-August 1, 1909. As Joan Ullman has explained in her classic book about the Tragic Week, the famished working class saw in the regular clergy the defenders of an oppressive political and economic system. Furthermore, in the conventual cottage industries, working women and families saw direct and unfair competition for whatever little supplementary income they could hope from such jobs as laundry, baking, or embroidery. Convent burning thus became an all too usual outlet for the working poor in moments of intense crisis, such as the one sparked by the disastrous Moroccan war, the military attempt to protect Spanish mining interests in North Africa, begun in 1904 and marked by costly defeats. Bocabella and the *Josefins*, for their part, saw in the figure of Saint Joseph—the humble carpenter who accepted the miracle of the incarnation without questions—the opposite of the bomb-throwing, arsonist anarchist. The new temple would expiate, or atone for, anarchist sins, thus its name.

When in 1884 Gaudí took over the direction of the works of the temple, he abandoned Villar’s plans. The temple’s crypt, the only Villar design built, evinces a conventional neo-gothic style in marked contrast with Gaudí’s work. Our architect assumed nevertheless the political aims of the conservative *Josefins*. The overpowering iconography of the place celebrates the triumph of the Church Mystical and of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. More explicitly, Gaudí incorporated at least one clear signal of Catholic reformism in the building. In a little-visited area, which forms a cloister adja-

cent to the cross nave by the Nativity portal, a capital under an arch shows the shape of a man clothed with the cotton overalls of the textile worker and shod with the unadorned *espartenyes*, or rope-soled shoes associated also with the working class. The worker receives a gift from a dragon figure, clearly an emblem of the devil. The gift is nothing less than a bomb.

The figure of the devil brings us at once to the past—to the Catholic tradition of displacing to the church cloister any figures of the demonic—and to the contemporary time of direct action and bomb-throwing. The “temps acumulat” is here put to the service of political ideology. The sculpted worker carries a bomb, of the type known as Orsini, such as anarchists actually threw. The anarchist Santiago Salvador, during an 1893 performance of *Guglielmo Tell*, tossed two Orsini bombs onto the main floor of the Liceu, the Barcelona opera house and bastion of the bourgeoisie. One of the bombs exploded, causing a number of fatalities. The second, as it happened, fell on the lap of one of the opera goers. The unexploded bomb has been preserved in the Barcelona museum of the history of the city and immortalized in the Sagrada Família.

In the nineteenth century, Catalonia—as well as Euskadi—experienced rapid industrialization, mostly in the labor-intensive textile sector. The growth of industry both benefited from and contributed to the weakening of local agriculture. Developments such as the spread of chemical fertilizers and the massive importation of raw cotton, mostly from the USA, destabilized the economy and the ecology of the Catalan countryside. Driven by hardship, Catalan country folk flocked

to the city and fed its already large working class. Barcelona grew by leaps and bounds during the last decades of the century. Phylloxera—an aphid that feeds on and destroys vine stock—made matters worse; it brought to a halt viticulture in Catalonia (as it had done in France) until new aphid-resistant American vines could be planted and grown to maturity. A cheap labor force was thus available to the textile industry. The population balance shifted dramatically. The Cuban and Moroccan wars drafted young men who could not pay for exemption (for a fee of fifteen hundred pesetas [García de Cortázar 238]). A good part of the working class became cannon fodder in ill-conceived military campaigns. The soldiers who returned saw that their jobs had been taken over by others, mostly women, whose salaries were even lower. Anarchism in Catalonia grew accordingly. Members of the Church thought that a spiritual revival could solve the social problem. The architect Gaudí felt the call of a higher faith.

Whenever rapid industrialization occurs, the imagination of a people is altered. Typically, a pastoral ideal reemerges. The countryside, often emblemized by the mountain, is idealized as its reality is debased. Leo Marx, in *The Machine in the Garden*, studied a similar phenomenon affecting New England writers of the mid nineteenth century. A similar dynamic of idealization and debasement took place in the Basque country, although there its realization was less literary than religious. The countryside of Euskadi was also increasingly alienated from the industrial centers of Bilbo-Barakaldo, Eibar, and Donostia. A number of mystical sightings of the Virgin Mary occurred in the Basque mountains, attracting many viewers (and

not a few from Catalonia), and defying the laic society predominant in the cities. I refer to the detailed study by William A. Christian titled *Visionaries*. In societies in the process of industrialization, the city is often seen as a siren, luring the innocent towards vice and suffering, while the country acquires an aura of purity and authenticity. The presumable continuity between city and country is broken, and the polarity established.

In Catalonia, the polarity between the city and the country is clear, radical, and decisive; the contrast between the city and the mountain assumes titanic dimensions. The antithesis carries into the psychological realm, and corresponds to the dynamic of Self and Other. Let me pause here to comment on my use of the word mountain. In Catalan, “*muntanya*” means both a mountain, an actual mass, and the wilds in general; it might be translated as “wilderness.” In literary artifacts of the time both meanings blend, and the sense of “mountain” is used metonymically for the countryside. The mountain invokes thoughts of life through its geology; it is seen as the producer of a particular flora and fauna, as well as of a particular people. The Catalans are children of the Pyrenees, of Montseny, of Montserrat, poetically speaking. At the same time, the mountain congeals the imagination of its poets, much as the Andes of Machu Picchu brought about Pablo Neruda’s majestic *Canto general*. In any case, in the 1840s, the Catalan mythical imagination began to revolve around the polarity mountain/city and its corollary nature/man. Such polarity informs most Catalan literature of the *Renaixença* and remains an ideological focus well into the twentieth century.

In this dynamic, idealization constituted the first trend. Life in the mountains held the possibility of purity. Romantically, nature *was* the Self, the city the Other. The emergent bourgeoisie and middle classes could only feel nostalgia for the open spaces, given the environment they had created for themselves and their workers: the crowded, polluted, noisy, artificial city. Most of modern Catalan literature deals at one time or another with the quest for a return to a mythical Arcadia, a lost paradise which can only be regained through civilization. In the early twentieth century, the values associated with the city and the country reversed. The city was no longer seen as corrupt or the country as idyllic. Still, the city/country dynamic continued. The *Modernista* essayist Jaume Brossa (1875-1919) put it succinctly: "L'humanisme és el triomf de la ciutat sobre la muntanya." The *Noucentistes* picked up the theme. Eugeni d'Ors, their spokesman, titled his *glosa* of May 15, 1907 "L'arranjament de les muntanyes." It begins: "No n'hi ha prou amb dur l'arbitrarietat als jardins: cal fer-la escalar les muntanyes." A year after this *glosa* was published, Guerau de Liost issued his first book of poems, with a foreword by d'Ors himself. Guerau's title: *La muntanya d'ametistes*; his theme: a description of the mountain of Montseny in the *précieux* terms of *Noucentisme's civiltat*.

Gaudí's architecture fits within the dynamic that we have been examining. His Park Güell might have been what d'Ors had in mind in the *glosa* cited above; his Sagrada Família was to bring the mountain to the city in a converse but complementary move to d'Ors's civilization of the wild: where d'Ors called for urbanizing the mountain, Gaudí wanted

to make the city more like nature. Gaudí's finished building was (and is) to be in the shape of a mountain, and specifically Catalonia's sacred mountain, Montserrat, home of *La Moreneta*, the famed black virgin who is the patron saint of Catalonia. In addition to its condition as mystical spot (remember Saint Ignatius Loyola had spent time meditating in its monastery), Montserrat had been identified as the mythical castle of Wagner's *Parsifal*, the almost homophonous Montsalvat (Soldevila 32). Wagner, however, had situated Montsalvat in the Pyrenees, right by Canigó, the site of Verdaguer's epic of that name. Closer to home, in 1881, Catalans had celebrated with great hoopla the millenary of the discovery, in the heights of Montserrat, of the image of its black Madonna.

The mountain as a locus symbolically opposed to the city generated a cluster of significations that dominated Catalan intellectual life for decades, from Verdaguer's *Canigó* of 1885 to the *Noucentista* poetry of Guerau de Liost in the first and second decades of the century. The symbolism of the mountain in the minds of many Catalan intellectuals virtually obliterates the distinction between text and referent. The ensuing ideological and symbolic connections appear as inspiration and motif, as material metaphor and grand thematic project, à la Wagner. They involve notions of nationalism as well as individuality, of religion as well as rebellion. They affect *Modernistes* as well as *Noucentistes*, and they include Gaudí's work, principally his Sagrada Família. With his grand project, the Mountain would come to the city. And so too would come the mountain's Madonna. She would not only atone for the

city's sins; her message of Christian obedience would become fertile; she would find her Holy Family, and Catalonia would find the Holy Grail to cure all its ills. In the irony of history, however, it has been the city—its affluence and its tourism—that has “redeemed” the mountain. Self and Other continue their dynamic. The Sagrada Família remains Barcelona's essential artificial mountain: a reminder of the complexities and contradictions of a city's life.

Notes

¹ I quote Soldevila in my own published English translation.

² *Renaixença* literature continued to place importance on non-urban themes and situations well into the end of the century. Bosch de la Trinxeria's *L'hereu Noradell*, published in Barcelona in 1889, is a good example of the attitude termed “pairalista” favored by many artists. The word “pairalista” derives from “pairal” and ultimately from “pares” or parents and attests to the rural origins of great segments of the Catalan population, including the inhabitants of Barcelona.

³ Thus the word “park” is spelled in English on its main gate.

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